

# Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Sue Hamilton, COTA/L

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## Introduction

This life history one of 31 life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, *Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming*. The purpose of the project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information.

This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

## Description of Participant

- Sue Hamilton started her OTA career in 1982 when she graduated from North Dakota State College of Science, Wahpeton.
- After graduation, Sue Hamilton worked in Rugby, North Dakota for 3 years.
- Sue moved to Fargo and worked for the public school system and MeritCare for 6 years.
- She moved back to Rugby to start a family in 1991 and has worked at the Heart of America Medical Center in acute care and swing bed units ever since.
- Sue is trained in manual lymphedema drainage therapy and has attended many conferences and continuing education workshops.
- She has mentored and supervised a number of fieldwork students.



## Literature Review

- In the 1970's and 1980's mass deinstitutionalization was occurring, creating many changes in policy such as the establishment and repeal of the Mental Health Services Act (1980-1981), and the patient bill of rights. (Mechanic, 2007)
- 1970-1985, the profession of occupational therapy experienced many changes such as
  - Solidifying profession identity
  - An influx in research
  - Role differentiation between OTRs and OTAs (Reed, 20017)
- 1976 NDOTA was established (Lind, 1987)
- Public law 94-142 passed in 1979 which required public schools to provide special education to students with disabilities. (Boyer, 1979)
- ND State Board of OT Practice established in 1983 (Archives, n.d.)

## Methodology

- The project was a qualitative study using a life history approach
- Participant was assigned from a list developed by the project directors through purposive sampling
- No specific gatekeeper issues – initial contact was made by project directors
- Informed consent was given
- The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the project directors. The questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of a larger project. The researchers were allowed to change or add interview questions as needed.
- The data was collected through a face to face, semi structured interview that lasted 1 hour.
- The interview was audio recorded then transcribed verbatim.

## Data Analysis

- The Kawa Model was the foundational theory used to guide our questions and the data analysis process. The main concept of the model is the river; which represents the individual and their “personal life history” (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The researchers looked at the turning points and obstacles that shaped Sue Hamilton's life.
- The categories that emerged were working with others, resilience to change, and clinical practice experience.
- These categories were then analyzed to find themes to understand the river flow of Sue Hamilton's career.

## Findings

### Working With Others:

- Sue has overcome challenges that initially came up while working with other disciplines about the scope of practice for occupational therapy.
- Sue values the knowledge that other disciplines bring to the table when working on a multidisciplinary team.
  - “They are awesome PT's... we do work really good together. And it's nice because, boy, it's good for patient care”.

### Resilience to Change:

- Sue has demonstrated resilience regarding the many changes to the scope of practice for OTAs.
- Sue has adapted to changes by continuing her education and receiving specialized training to give the client the best possible care.
  - “COTA's roles have got smaller, which, you know, I understand it's hard. It's kind of hard for me because I've done so much in the past, you know? It's just what it is, I understand that. And I have huge respect for OTR's because of all the knowledge.”

### Clinical Practice:

- Sue has a rich variety of knowledge across many aspects of OT.
- Sue has a passion for client-centered and occupation-based practice.
  - “I still do a lot of things in the kitchen, cooking, because with elderly people that really motivates them.”
- Sue also has certification in lymphedema care.

## Conclusions

- Through the interview the researchers were able to gain understanding of the barriers Sue has faced while working in rural care in North Dakota. Additionally, the researchers were able to appreciate the residency Sue had to overcome these changes.
- Sue's passion for occupation-based intervention has positively impacted the type of client care she gives.
- Sue continues to advance her education and gain skills to create the best quality of care for her clients.

### Final Assertion

Sue Hamilton has built a rich and meaningful career in rural health through her experiences working with others, being resilient to change in OTA's scope of practice, and by immersing herself in learning opportunities that provide a variety of services for her clients

## References

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